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FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN

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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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SUBJECT: OBSERVERS GIVE ARMENIA'S ELECTION A PASSING GRADE,
BUT WE'RE NOT SO SURE

Classified By: CDA A.F.Godfrey for reason 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Armenia's Parliamentary elections took place on May

¶12. Preliminary results show a strong victory by PM Sargsian's Republican Party. These same early results show that the new oligarch-led "Prosperous Armenia" party ran a distant second and three other parties -- including two opposition parties -- cleared the five-percent threshold required to win seats in the party-list contest. These results do not track with a USG-funded poll conducted just over a week before Election Day, which showed that Sargsian's Republican Party would be the top vote-getter, but nowhere near the results now being reported.

¶12. (C) Statements of international observer groups noted significant problems, but gave the elections a passing grade, stating that they were "a significant improvement and were conducted largely in accordance with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and other international standards." The statement's next sentence stepped backward somewhat, but will be less widely quoted: noting that authorities "were unable to fully deliver" on its obligations. In most polling stations, the vote and the count took place in an orderly environment where domestic observers and party representatives were able to help ensure transparency and accuracy. In a significant number of polling places, however, U.S. Embassy observers saw outrageous violations which did affect the outcome of results. Some of this disparity in perception was the product of our decision to send our observers to the areas most likely to have irregularities.

¶13. (C) We know that the ODIHR observers were under strong pressure to issue a unified statement with other observer groups. The ODIHR Election Observer Mission Leader had told us that he expected the statement to be the "least common denominator." We expect that the superficial understanding by other observer missions of the political environment here may have played a role, as did the views of the significant number of Russian observers present. We also acknowledge that the process of elections through Election Day, in fact, significantly better than any other recent election in Armenia.

¶14. (C) The statements of the observer groups, by necessity, were issued quickly, before all results were tabulated and before accusations of falsification by domestic groups could be considered. We expect that -- as in Armenia's 2003 election -- as time goes by and more is learned about the process, the view of international observer groups will become more negative.

¶15. (C) We suggest that any USG response to press queries about Armenia's election should be somewhat tentative, and should include the following elements:

- We welcomed the Armenian parliamentary elections and congratulate the Armenian people on what appears to have been a more successful poll than previous elections. We share the satisfaction of international observers that the infrastructure, both legal and technical, has been greatly improved.

- We value highly the work of the many election officials who were dedicated to completing their work with integrity.

- We note ODIHR Ambassador Frlec's comment that this election is not over. We await a careful consideration of all issues raised in connection with the election, including several serious allegations of fraud which may affect the outcome of some of the races.

- We hope for aggressive investigation and prosecution of allegations of electoral fraud.

GODFREY